

Walk and Be Well

So you're not a lean, mean, fat-burnin' machine in fluorescent lime-green full-body spandex perched atop the latest pair of bubble-bottomed Road Eraser 2000s. And you think Heavy Hands are what an overbearing boss has. You're a prime candidate to join the proud ranks of walkers.

Runners may say walking is too slow, bicyclists may say there's not enough equipment, and fans of the treadmill may complain walking is just too stimulating. But walkers can cover more area than anyone else.

On foot you can pass through forests too dense for horse or cycle, you can go up boulders too rough for a jeep or sport utility vehicle.

When you walk you're in the company of people like Colin Fletcher who, at age 71, continue to criss-cross the country on foot – including a spiritual odyssey of 2 months when he walked the length of the Grand Canyon. Consider Wilfred Thesiger, who walked across Africa so many times he wore out his knees. Robyn Davidson trekked across half of Australia – much on camel, but when things got tough she took to her feet. Sir Richard Burton roamed the African and Asian continents, bringing back to Western culture knowledge of things both beautiful and disturbing. Our own John Muir's wanderings helped establish some of our national parks. Thoreau found himself entranced as he walked and observed details. Audubon often walked 100 miles in 2 days... because he wanted to.

Thousands have set out walking to find freedom and opportunity or to escape famine and war. And many walkers have recorded their travels and inspired others to find their own adventures afoot.

As walkers we can learn a lot from these people; they share many characteristics – thoughtful, intelligent, curious, and determined. It's fun and inspiring to read about these walkers, and even pick one as your own walking hero or heroine. We also can learn from them the importance of keeping a journal or diary.

The advantages are numerous. As we walk and reflect, many things can become quite clear – big troubles end up being petty, and complex situations can have simple solutions. You don't have to take 4 years off to walk through some exotic land and make discoveries that will end up in National Geographic to be an observant, practiced walker. Look, listen, and smell – just the distractions can help you remember what's important and relieve the blues. Note when birds nest, how slowly the leaves of autumn are falling, how the sky changes with time and season, how the amber

glow of lit windows feels warm, who's cooking dinner, and where the roses are in full bloom. Then capture and record your feelings, your contemplations, from your walks. Reviewing these personal insights is a wonderful way to regain your balance – even on a rainy day.

So put on your comfortable walking shoes, dress with style (leave the lime-green spandex in the closet), and go out for a ramble.

